

# The LURE of PERIL

## MAJOR-BURNHAM-AMERICAN FIGHTS for BRITISH in SOUTH AFRICA

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**T**HIS American kuleu the great and terrible Matabele God Mlimo, thereby ending a bloody war. An Empire was the British Empire, when it found itself humbled by the victories of the Boers—over its best troops in South Africa—

descended to ask for his help, the help of an American citizen because he possessed the kind of brains they lacked. The man is Major Frederick Russell Burnham, the story of whose manly life in the Dark Continent, like the deeds of many others there, reads like the inventions of a romancer.

You can count on your fingers, and then have some to spare, the men who have become famous in two or more countries on their real merits, who have contributed to the world's history and put the color of romance and the fire of action into its matter of fact pages. I do not mean those professional warriors who were sent out by their respective countries at the head of legions, with the resources and wealth of Empires behind them, or men who were made heroes by the inflated newspaper inventions of copy manufacturers. Not men who could not be anything but heroes, for the mere fact that they were paid huge sums by these nations who employed them. The very cowardice of such men is extolled into masterly retreats and cool, calm courage in adversity in front of overwhelming numbers. You all remember the Boer war, where even stupid and disinterested niles were blamed for the crushing disasters of General Buller at the hands of General Louis Botha with a handful of Boer burghers at Colenso.

This is not about a man who could not help being a hero, a man who was a hero in spite of himself. It is about a man who "made good" as the Americans say, ever against prejudice in a foreign land, as well as in his own. A man like such men as Lafayette, Garibaldi, Paul Jones, Henry Stanley, and the few others of their kind who have found the routine of civilization commonplace and uninteresting, nerve racking in its monotony, like the clash of a cracked drum. Such a man is Major Frederick Russell Burnham, known everywhere, from Melbourne to Port Arthur, from Port Arthur to Paris, from Cape to Cairo, from Cairo to New York, from New York to Frisco, from Alaska's snowy wastes to the parched plains of Mexico. Burnham, who has not heard of him. Had he been born with a hundred million behind him you would perhaps be not surprised that Frederick Russell Burnham has made a world acquaintance, has put the seal of his genius on the earth's annals. Burnham had not this advantage. Instead of being born with the proverbial golden spoon in his mouth he probably was very satisfied with a galvanized iron one. He started his independent life with a rifle and a few rounds of ammunition, and on such a beginning laid the foundation to world fame, and sees himself, while he still lives, a man unquestioned note, a man to whom the British Empire is in debt.

It is the habit of success, purchased by the exercise of intelligent energy, mainly rectitude and indomitable courage that made Major Burnham respected and admired even by his enemies. I, myself, have tossed coins with a brother scout for the privilege of having first shot at him, of splitting his body with a bullet. Had I succeeded I would have had the lugubrious satisfaction of writing the major's obituary notice, which had my aim been true, would have read thus:

Killed, Major Frederick Russell Burnham, chief of Scouts of the British Army attached to the column of Lord Roberts. Shot in a skirmish fifteen miles northeast of Kroonstad. Instead of being buried under the sod of the African veld, Major Burnham, ever where danger flouts its crimson flag, is down in Mexico among the Yaki Indians where, with John Hays Hammond and Harry Payne Whitney he is developing a huge tract of land which he expects will make a considerable addition to his already comfortable fortune in a very short time. That is why he is doing to-day, to-morrow he might be standing with his back against a cliff with half a dozen savages around him thirsting for his blood, whilst he is doing his "durned" to continue his eventful existence.

How did it come that an American, and Americans after all are never really liked by the English, who are always prejudiced against anything that is not under the Union Jack, became a British hero, with a dozen gallant deeds to his credit, any one of which would have brought him, or anyone else, fame?

How did Burnham come to be in Africa? This is the story of an extraordinary career.

fired by the Redskin Chief Red Cloud, after he had massacred the women and children of the town, go up in flames.

On one occasion his mother fled before the savage attack of the Indians and knowing that the heavy child in her arms would sooner or later result in her capture and be the death of them both. Watching her chance she hid her precious child under a shock of corn and drew the pursuing Redskins in an opposite direction. She escaped, and when the Indians were at last driven off she found her baby Fred sound asleep unconscious of the terrible fighting that had been raging around him. This baptism of fire fitted Frederick Russell Burnham for the adventurous roll he was to fill in after years.

He was living in Los Angeles, California, when his father died, leaving him a lad of twelve, to care for his mother. For a time after the head of the house passed away Mrs. Burnham and her boy felt the pangs of poverty. The boy got a job as mounted messenger, became the breadwinner of the household. An uncle in one of the eastern states hearing the family's plight offered to care for Mrs. Burnham and her son. Here young Fred Burnham's grit got a chance to show itself, and it did. He refused to become a burden and at the mature age of thirteen, he took up his rifle

only brute courage and a carelessness about the continuance of his own existence that succeeds in the arduous task of inflicting civilization on the land. It requires the thinker as well; therefore the scholar and scientist are found more frequently than the ordinary adventurer waiting for the main chance. Burnham during his many duties in the Southwest, found time to study and become a proficient naturalist, geologist and mineralogist. This, with his scouting experience and his all-round general knowledge gained in the school of hard experience, make him a valuable man for any new country.

In 1893, longing for new fields of adventure and fresh openings for his energy, Burnham packed up, and accompanied by his wife and brother-in-law, set sail for South Africa, the land of diamonds, gold, Kaffirs, Boers and war, and he got what he wanted. Primarily his idea was to prospect for gold and precious stones in German South West Africa, and pick up a fight where he could.

He no sooner reached the Dark Continent than the news of the first Matabele war reached his ears. There was nothing else to do—no choice to make. In his eagerness to fight he forgot the quest for gold, and lured

It was a daring plan and it required a daring set to carry it out. The whole affair, although the men were under the command of Major Wilson, was practically in the hands of Burnham, who, with his brother-in-law, Ingram, were to be the scouts; or otherwise, the eyes and intelligence of the venture.

With twelve men, besides Burnham and Ingram, Major Wilson set out at nightfall to ride through the Matabele to Lobengula's camp, seize him and fight their way out.

It was a terrible night—just one for such a deed—a terrific thunderstorm raged. Rain fell in torrents like silver sheets on the vivid blue of the flash and crash of the lightning. The incessant roll of the thunder made it impossible to command, and the earth became a lake of rushing waters.

Three thousand warriors were camped around their king on the Shangani river, and through these in a wild ride galloped the daring little band, their only hope lying in sudden action. They rushed the trek wagon which they thought Lobengula was using as his camp. The dizzy dancing of the lightning, which was succeeded by the sudden inky blackness, blinded and confused them and they

ham told Major Wilson he would require some one to lead his horse. Major Wilson volunteered. Burnham often traveled on his knees to keep the "spoor" and before morning he was rewarded by finding the three troopers unharmed but lost in the jungle. This feat established Burnham's reputation with the British and made him a criterion.

Back at the hill again they joined their anxious and waiting comrades and then the watch for dawn and escape commenced. All around they could hear the Kaffirs preparing to rush them,



"All around they could hear the Kaffirs preparing to rush them, and when the lightning flashed they could see the glistening naked bodies in the rain."

and went into the wilderness of the Great Southwest to be a scout.

He fought Indians and highwaymen, searched for gold with prospectors, hunted big game to supply the camps with meat, always doing more than a man's share. At last he got his wish. He became a scout. For fifteen years he wandered over that wilderness of canyon and desert that runs from the Great Divide to Mexico. Fighting the fierce Apache, hunting Mexican thieves, doing everything that was part of the daily life of a scout in those days. Everyone throughout the West knew or knew of Fred Burnham, a brave man, a wonderful scout, a splendid shot, and a fine horseman.

What better training could a man have to fit him for the position of chief of the British Scouts in South Africa? His selection by the British was one of the clever acts of the campaign, which stands out like an incandescent light on a dark road of blunders.

Major Burnham in appearance is of muscular, tight-knit build, a little under medium height, has a soldierly bearing and dresses like a business man. His face, the conspicuous part of him, carries the story of his life and puts the seal of the deed done on all he tells; it is strong without being tough, a peculiar and noticeable characteristic of the African pioneers of all races. In Africa it is not the sun-burning frontiersman, who has

by his love for danger, offered his services to the British South Africa Company, which was conducting a private war against King Lobengula and his Kaffir warriors.

It did not take Burnham long to get into the swing of African campaigning and his ability was soon recognized by the British, even with their prejudices against all Americans. The destruction of Major Allen Wilson and his men at the hands of Lobengula's warriors and the daring work of Frederick Russell Burnham were the two conspicuous events in the campaign. Burnham's gallant effort to save Wilson's party made him a hero where practically everyone had an heroic deed to his credit.

Major Forbes, with about three hundred men who were all tried and true, was out to give battle to King Lobengula and his warrior hosts. While Forbes' force was pursuing the king and his warriors, he in turn was being followed by an army of warlike Matabele who were operating the well-known surrounding movement practiced in all campaigns by the African races related to the Zulus, and which has cost the British more than one defeat at the hands of the Kaffirs.

As the fighting was costly and the results in battle even at the best uncertain, the British conceived the idea of capturing the main cause of the war, the Warrior King Lobengula.

and when the lightning flashed, they could see the glistening naked bodies in the rain. Just before dawn they heard the unmistakable sounds of marching cavalry. They thought that the column of Major Forbes had ridden to their rescue. Instead, it was Captain Borrow who was sent to their aid with twenty men. The Kaffirs with splendid skill concealed the fact that they had surrounded Wilson and allowed Borrow with his troop to join Wilson, preferring to concentrate their attack on one place. A little later dawn drove the night from the jungle and in the ashy gray of the wet morning the Matabele opened the attack from every piece of cover they could find. Assegais rained into the defense that was made of the carcasses of the dead horses, and bullets flew from every tree, tearing the flesh of the living and the dead. One by one the defenders fell and the Matabele, encouraged by their success, made a wild rush, howling in the delight of their blood lust, holding their shields before them and swinging their knobkerries at the heads of the whites who could see that unless a miracle happened they were fighting over their graves. A well-aimed volley drove them back, hurling death into

their ranks. They rallied and rushed, and again the foremost fell before Wilson's men. One by one the troopers were picked off, and Major Wilson, seeing that a desperate chance must be taken to save the small remnant of his force, asked Burnham to break through the enemy's lines if possible, and bring help from Forbes. Ingram and an inexperienced trooper named Gooding were detailed to accompany Burnham. "One of you might succeed," said Major Wilson, who saw a man drop at his side as he spoke.

Taking the surviving horses, Burnham and his two comrades, leaping the breastwork of human bodies and horses' carcasses, started their ride through the line of investing Kaffirs. No sooner were they on the open than the fire of the Kaffirs was concentrated upon them. Spears were hurled from every bush, and although they and their horses were often grazed, they escaped serious hurt. From one side to the other they were driven, Burnham using every wave of his mental energy to save them from destruction. Every hollow in the ground had become a lake and every rift a roaring torrent from the night rains. It was ride around this, through that, over the cliffs, into the waters, swimming and climbing with the continual sing-zip of the Kaffir bullets around their heads. Every trick Burnham learned in the Southwest amongst the Indians he used and those, no doubt, saved their lives. When he came in view of Forbes' column he found them surrounded like the party he had left. Riding through the circle of attacking natives he got into the ring of fighting troopers, who had all they could do to hold their own against their enemies.

Burnham delivered his message: "I have been sent for re-enforcements by Major Wilson. I believe that we are the only surviving members of his party." Major Forbes could not move and could not spare enough men without risking the destruction of his troop, and Burnham and his companions, seeing the situation, joined in the fight and helped to drive off the Matabele. Six weeks later the bodies of Wilson's troops were found lying in a circle, where they fell, not one, with the exception of Burnham and his daring companions, having escaped the relentless asagais of the Matabele. This would be enough bravery for the average man, but not for Frederick Russell Burnham. If there were anything of a dangerous nature to be accomplished, Burnham generally was the one to do it. So open did he volunteer to do hair-raising deeds, and succeed in doing them, that it became the habit in Matabeleland for all eyes to turn his way when death was to be defied in the performance of some act that would make the ordinary man stand and tremble.

The next little service that Burnham rendered the British Empire was the killing of the notable "God" Mlimo. This deed alone probably saved thousands of lives, millions of pounds and prevented the likelihood of an uprising of the blacks in South Africa, for there was a general unrest amongst them, and many had secured modern arms and they got a general idea of military tactics as practiced by the British, through experience in their previous campaign. For these reasons the second Matabele war was much more serious than the first. So serious, in fact, that the Chartered Company could not cope with it and they called in Imperial troops. They made very little difference as far as getting any results were concerned, and it looked like a long and doubtful campaign.

The leading spirit of the Matabele was Mlimo, a brave and patriotic priest, who hated the whites who had invaded his country. So magnetic a personality

had he that he was regarded by the natives as a god. And, like most men who are given credit for supernatural powers, he pretended to live up to them. He told his tribesmen that no harm would ever come to them in a war against the whites, as he would turn their bullets to water, blind them, and leave their women and children at the mercy of their spears.

Things were certainly serious. The gloom of uncertainty crept over the British, and visions of the bloody Zulu war rose and were reflected by the London press. The war could be ended only by some sudden and masterful coup, and the brains of the home tacticians strained for ideas, but in vain, and the prospect of a rainy season, which would greatly favor the Matabele warriors, was before them.

At this juncture the commissioner of the district, a young fellow named Armstrong, suggested that Mlimo be captured or destroyed. How? Had not the army been breaking its neck to accomplish that? It did not strike the ponderous tacticians that a couple of men often do what is impossible for an army. Armstrong told the commander that he knew where Mlimo made his retreat. The British commander called for volunteers to capture the "god." Burnham was a chronic volunteer, and he and Armstrong set out to capture Mlimo.

It was a terrible task, for the priest had selected a cave at the top of a kopje as his headquarters, and surrounded himself with an army of two thousand tried warriors, who were encamped at the foot of the hill. Beside this the scouts of the blacks kept the country completely under their eyes. What chance had an enemy to pass these brave and alert savages, especially a white skinned one? One in a thousand. Yet Burnham and his companion took the chance. It was a nerve strainer. Mile after mile they covered, crawling, running, riding, hiding, hardly daring to breathe when near the Kaffirs, sometimes covering half a mile an hour sometimes a little more. The last mile they covered took them three hours. At last, unperceived, they reached the foot of Mlimo's kopje. Slowly from bush to bush, from boulder to boulder, they crept like wounded lizards until the opening of the "god's" cave dwelling showed black before them an hour after they had started the ascent.

Burnham, being the better shot, was to fire first, for they decided that under the circumstances Mlimo could not be taken alive. And they also knew that their shot would be the signal to the thousands of warriors below to attack them and there would be little chance to escape, but that was a secondary consideration.

Closer they crowded to the mouth of the cave. They waited, but the "god" could not be seen. A little nearer and nearer. Burnham was now in the entrance and a cry came out of the darkness inside, and the giant, befeathered Mlimo sprang at him. His rifle blazed once and his bullet opened the heart of the savage. The shot echoed through the hills and in a moment the Matabele army was in arms and rushing toward the cave and spreading in a search for the shooters. Burnham and Armstrong flew over the ground like springboks, dodging shots and spears. They reached their mounts in safety and then rode like demons for their lives, being driven into a corner half a dozen times from which they had to fight their way like bull buffaloes. They escaped and reached Bulawayo.

The Matabele, finding that their "god" was a pretender as far as his divine powers were concerned, ceased hostilities. Frederick Russell Burnham ended the war with one shot and added another success to British arms.

For his courage and devotion Burnham was greatly honored by the British and he and Ingram, with the Honorable Manuel Clifford, were jointly given a tract of land three hundred miles long in appreciation of their services.

When the British were at war with the Boers Lord Roberts, knowing the weakness of his army, which had no trained eyes, called on Burnham to become his chief of scouts. His exceptional services to the British in the campaign won him his military title and made him a perpetual officer of the British army on full pay. He was also decorated with the Distinguished Service Order by King Edward. Beside this, he wears on the breast of his uniform a number of other medals, the insignia of his love for the lure of peril.

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